Examples of research

1 Children Living In A Violent World?

Example of research

The British Crime Survey was for the first time extended during 2009 to cover children aged 10 to 15. Noting that the levels of victimization reported by children were alarmingly high and would massively increase the BCS estimates on the prevalence of crime, four approaches to classifying crimes experienced by children are outlined in the report:

- *All in law* include all incidents reported by children that are in law a crime; that is, where the victim perceived intent on the part of the perpetrator to inflict hurt or damage or to steal property. There were 2,153,000 in law incidents, 641,000 of which were violence against the person resulting in injury.
- *Norms-based* apply an explicit set of normative rules to exclude relatively minor incidents. These rules were developed from the findings of qualitative research with children but a panel of adults decides what most people would view as a 'crime' to a child. There were 1,055,000 norms-based incidents, 548,000 of which were violence against the person resulting in injury.
- *All in law outside school* include all incidents reported by children that are in law a crime except those occurring in school. This approach is a rough approximation of the guidance issued jointly by the (then) Department for Children, Schools and Families, Home Office and Association of Chief Police Officers in July 2007 (Home Office, 2009a) which provides that unless the child or the parent/guardian asks for the police to record these crimes (or if the crime is deemed to be more serious) then the matter remains within the school's internal disciplinary processes. This is likely to result in most low-level incidents being dealt with by school authorities and not recorded as crimes by the police. There were 643,000 in law outside school incidents, 249,000 of which were violence against the person resulting in injury.
- *Victim perceived* include all incidents in law defined as a crime that are also thought by victims themselves to be crimes. This is a wholly subjective measure based on the perceptions of the individual child. There were 404,000 victim perceived incidents, 171,000 of which were violence against the person resulting in injury.

(Adapted from Millard and Flatley, 2010)

The victim perceived estimates are consistently lower than the other three. The 'all in law' estimates are consistently higher. (Adapted from Flatley *et al.*, 2010)

Activity

What are the possible explanations for the differences between the rates of victimization as defined by criminal law and the rates based on victim perceptions?

The BCS four-level definitional problem compares 'objective measures' (based on a legal definition of crime or agreed criteria such as injuries or harm) with 'subjective measures' (based on victim perception of an experience as an act of abuse or a crime).

What are the advantages and disadvantages in using objective or subjective measures to research children's experiences of crime, violence and abuse?

1 Children Living In A Violent World?

Example of research—Child Abuse and Neglect in the UK Today

A household survey was conducted for the NSPCC in 2009. Some 6,196 interviews about childhood experiences of maltreatment and victimization were collected from parents reporting for children aged under 11, from children and young people aged 11 to 17 and from young adults aged 18 to 24. The researchers' findings on the rates of maltreatment and victimization reported for children between the ages of 1 month and 18 years and for young adults reporting childhood experiences are given in Table 1.2.

Table 1.2 Prevalence of child maltreatment and victimization

Type of abuse	Caregiver report child aged under 11 lifetime abuse (%)	Caregiver report child aged under 11 past year abuse (%)	Self-reports young people 11 to 17 years lifetime abuse (%)	Self-reports young people 11 to 17 years past year abuse (%)	Self-reports on abuse in childhood by 18- to 24-year-olds (%)
Severe maltreatment by an adult and forced contact sexual abuse any perpetrator	5.9	–	18.6	–	25.3
Maltreatment by parent/guardian	8.9	2.5	21.9	6	24.5
Maltreatment by an adult not living in the home	2.3	1.2	7.8	3.1	12.8
Sexual abuse	1.2	0.6	16.5	9.4	24.1
Intimate partner abuse	–	–	7.9	5	13.4
Victimization by peers	28	20.2	59.5	35.3	63.2
Exposure to parental domestic violence	12	3.2	17.5	2.5	23.7

Source: Radford *et al.* (2011)

There is a sizeable gap between the numbers of maltreated children brought to the attention of child protection services and the numbers reported to have been maltreated in self-report surveys The NSPCC researchers reported the following findings:

- Of those physically hurt by caregivers in childhood, in 22.9 per cent of cases nobody knew about it.
- Of those who experienced contact sexual abuse by an adult in childhood in 34 per cent of cases nobody knew about it.
- Of those who experienced contact sexual abuse from a peer in childhood, in 82.7 per cent of cases nobody else knew about it.

Comparing responses to 26 survey questions used by the NSPCC to research the prevalence of child maltreatment in 1998/1989 and replicated with the young adult sample in 2009, the researchers found no changes in the prevalence of child neglect but a general decline in reported experiences of harsh emotional and physical treatment, and also in experiences of some types of physical and sexual violence.

Activity

Looking at Table 1.1, which perpetrators of maltreatment and victimization would you say are most frequently reported? Do you think they also pose the greatest risks to children's well-being?

2 Why Are Some Children Violent?

Example of research

Between 2003 to 2007 the Home Office conducted an annual survey of young people's (10 to 25 years) self-reported experiences of crime. The surveys found that the majority of young people (78% in 2006) had not committed any of the 20 core offences in the past 12 months. Those who did break the law did so infrequently and committed relatively trivial offences. In the 2006 survey 22 per cent had committed at least one of the 20 core offences in the past 12 months, the most commonly reported offences being assault (12%) and thefts (12%). Half (50%) of those who had committed any offence in the previous 12 months had also been victims of a personal crime in the same time period compared to about one-fifth (19%) of those who had not committed any offence. Twenty-two per cent of young people had committed at least one type of anti social behaviour in the past 12 months, the most frequent being noisy or rude in public (13%) and behaving in a way likely to cause a neighbour to complain (11%). The peak age for offending was between ages 14 and 17, with a high overlap between this and anti social behaviour which peaked earlier at ages 14 to 15. Males were found to be more likely to offend and commit antisocial behaviour than females. Four per cent of 10- to 25-year-olds were prolific offenders responsible for 32 per cent of all offences. Prolific offenders begin offending at an earlier age, at 12.4 years.

Sources: Hales *et al.*, (2009); Roe and Ashe, (2008)

2 Why Are Some Children Violent?

Example of research: Victim to victimizer

Burton and colleagues (2011) studied the offender pathways of 325 incarcerated adolescent male sex offenders, ranging in age from 12 to 19. Fifty-five per cent had themselves been sexually abused during childhood. The researchers compared the developmental antecedents (trauma, family characteristics, exposure to pornography, personality factors) and behavioural characteristics of the victimized and the non-victimized sex offenders to test whether the history and severity of a young person's own experiences of sexual abuse influenced the subsequent abusive behaviour and its severity. Sexually victimized child sex offenders had more adverse developmental antecedents than did non-sexually victimized offenders. They not only had more experiences of childhood victimization than the non-victimized juvenile sex offenders, they were more likely to have witnessed criminality at home or in their communities and were more likely to have exposure to pornography before age 10. The victimized sex offenders were found to start abuse at a younger age (11.7 years compared with 13.3 years), were more likely to commit incest, had higher numbers of reported victims, were more likely to abuse males, to commit more serious offences and to use pornography. The victimized group had more traumatic childhoods, elevated scores on personality measures, lived in more crimogenic environments and exhibited more antisocial behaviours, which started younger and lasted longer than behaviours exhibited by the non-victimized sex offenders. Moffit's categorization of early onset, adolescent onset and life course persistent offending was applied to the sex offender research to identify early onset (paraphilic) offenders who abuse children, adolescent onset (non-paraphilic) offenders who sexually abuse adults and peers, and life course persistent offenders. The researchers concluded that the victimized offenders were best understood as life course persistent and early onset offenders while the non-sexually victimized offenders showed more adolescent limited behaviour patterns, being delinquent youth who commit sexual offences.

Reflections on the research

What conclusions can be drawn from this research for assessment and treatment of young people with sexually harmful behaviour?

3 What Causes Child Maltreatment?

Example of research

Strange situation experiment:

1 Parent and child are alone in the room.
2 Child explores the room without parental participation.
3 Stranger enters the room, talks to the parent, approaches the child.
4 Parent quietly leaves the room.
5 Parent then returns and comforts the child.

Ainsworth *et al*. (1978) identified three main attachment styles from their observations of mothers and infants aged between 9 and 18 months of age—secure (where the child is upset when the parent leaves but is soon comforted on return), anxious/ambivalent (where the child is greatly distressed when the parent leaves and does not appear to be comforted on return) and avoidant (where the child may avoid contact with the parent, does not seek comfort and shows little preference between the parent and stranger).

3 What Causes Child Maltreatment?

Example of research: the family violence perspective

The family violence perspective perceived the family as being an institution founded upon conflict, conflict between men and women and between parents and children. Family violence researchers based their thinking on findings from national surveys of adults living in the USA, the National Family Violence Surveys conducted in 1975 and 1985 (Straus *et al.*, 1980; Straus and Smith, 1990). These found high prevalence rates of physical violence in the home—violence between husbands and wives, siblings, parents towards children and children towards elders—all of which were seen to be linked. While family violence researchers acknowledge that the causes of child maltreatment and family violence are many, violence is an option available to resolve disputes where a society creates the conditions—such as family privacy—where this is acceptable. Two potent factors increase the likelihood that it will occur: social learning and stress in the context of reduced resources for coping with stress. These are likely to vary across different cultures and societies. Children learn that violence is appropriate from parents, who in many societies across the world have the state-sanctioned ability to use physical violence to 'discipline' them. However, whether or not a person will use violence depends on the level of stress and resources they have, which are affected by individual and structural factors. While stress does not cause family violence, and there are other responses to stress apart from abuse, violence is more likely in the stressful context of socially isolated low-income families. Straus and Smith (1990) maintain that, although women seldom use violence towards others outside the family, they are as likely as are men to use it against adults and children within the home. Women use more violence in the family towards children and partners because they are most likely to be exposed to the frustrations of childcare in societies where they are expected to carry the bulk of responsibility for looking after children.

4 Consequences

Example of research—young people's views on maltreatment

Mudaly and Goddard (2006) found that some of the children whom they interviewed about experiences of abuse had thought what was happening to them was 'normal' at the time, and it was not until they were older and had wider interactions with people outside the immediate family that they started to question this.

> 'Things were very normal for me. I saw things as being very normal. I didn't know any differently. I mean I wasn't ecstatic with life but there weren't any disruptions, I was just going along with it. . . . It was just like washing the dishes or taking the dog for a walk. The abuse just slotted into it all.'
>
> (18-year-old female talking about childhood sexual abuse in Mudaly and Goddard, 2006, p. 80)

Question

What are the implications of this for public education about violence and maltreatment in childhood?

Younger children may be aware of problems but may be less likely than older children to understand what is happening and why.

> 'I didn't quite understand it when I was so young, because . . . I just got used to it, when he used to hit me and my little brother and then my mum. I just got used to it.'
>
> (Marilyn, aged 15, McGee, 2000, p. 98)

4 Consequences

Example of research—polyvictimization

Children who experience child maltreatment, sexual abuse or physical violence are at greater risk of re-victimization (Finkelhor *et al.*, 2005a) and polyvictimization (Finkelhor *et al.*, 2005b), with the risks of victimization and trauma impact increasing with age (Finkelhor *et al.*, 2009). Exploring data from a national study in the USA of children's experiences of victimization (the Developmental Victimization Survey (DVS)) Finkelhor, Ormrod, Turner and Hamby found that children with four or more different experiences of victimization in the past year, children who were 'polyvictims', were more likely than were children who had experienced one type of victimization to have high trauma symptoms. While certain types of victimization are thought generally to be more severe or more likely to be traumatizing (e.g. being injured, maltreated by a caregiver, sexually abused, attacked with a weapon), the researchers found that children who were polyvictims had higher trauma symptoms than even those children who repeatedly experienced a single form of victimization. To tackle the adverse consequences it is important that professionals who work with children and young people explore beyond presenting issues to look holistically at all experiences of violence and abuse and how these interact.

4 Consequences

Example of research—children with child protection plans

Research with 26 children and young people with child protection plans but mostly still living at home found that having friends to confide in was an important part of coping (Cossar *et al.*, 2011). Coping also included behaviour that helped young people feel better but was likely to be harmful—fighting back against bullies, missing school, shutting down, taking drugs, getting drunk or self-harming.

> 'A couple of weeks ago I cut myself, but you could see where I was doing it I wasn't doing it to kill myself I was doing it to like, because my friend was like threatening to hit me and that, so to take the pain away from losing my friends I had to do something to hurt myself.'
>
> (Carol, aged 14, Cossar *et al.*, 2011)

4 Consequences

Example of research—children living with domestic violence

These strategies may go together, as in the following extract from an interview with an 11-year-old boy living with domestic violence, where he describes some of the things he did to avoid the abuse, to comfort himself and his brother and to try to monitor what was happening to his mother:

> 'We would get together when T [abuser] and Mum were arguing, and cuddle up and put some music on in C's [brother's] room. When it started, I used to climb out of the window and climb back in C's window to get to C because I couldn't go out the door because they were arguing and shouting and he [abuser] was hitting and I was so frightened. Then we'd be together and we'd try to play music so we couldn't hear, but we'd still listen. Or we'd go on one of the outside roofs outside and crouch there together. And we'd stick together. Sometimes I'd cuddle up into his bed. Sometimes I'd go to sleep on the floor and then, early in the morning, before Mum woke up, I'd creep back into my own room. So no one ever knew we would do it. … We used to cry together about it. We're very close. He looked after me.'
>
> <div align="right">(11-year-old boy, Mullender et al., 2003, p. 125)</div>

In Mullender *et al.*'s research half of the 45 young people living with domestic violence who were interviewed had intervened to protect the mother or siblings while half had not. It was less likely that children under the age of 12 would say they had tried to stop the violence by active intervention. However, staying awake at night to monitor and listen out for what might be happening was a common strategy reported by younger children. While some children physically intervened, especially older boys, the most common active protective strategy employed was not to get in the way of the perpetrator but to try to stop the violence by shouting, or calling the police or a neighbour to help. Children and young people take an active part in supporting one another as siblings and friends and emotionally supporting and helping the mother (Mullender *et al.*, 2003).

5 Villains and Victims

Examples of research: The reality gap in public perceptions of youth behaviour

- Parent reports on their teenage children's antisocial behaviour (including lying, stealing and disobedience) increased throughout the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s before falling slightly in the 2000s (HM Government, 2009).
- Smoking and cannabis use by young people declined in the 10 years up until 2009 but alcohol consumption by 11- to 15-year-olds doubled and the proportion of English and Welsh 15-year-olds who report having ever been drunk is twice the rate reported in other European countries (HM Government, 2009).
- Sixty-six per cent of those interviewed for the British Crime Survey 2009 to 2010 believed overall crime to be increasing, 90 per cent believed knife crime had increased nationally, while 81 per cent thought gun crime had risen, whereas reported incidents of gun crime declined by 3 per cent in 2009–2010 and injuries caused by sharp implements fell by 4 per cent (Flatley *et al.*, 2010).
- Longer term trends from the BCS show that since 1995, the number of violent incidents has fallen by half (50%) and in 2009 to 2010 were at a similar level to 1981 (Flatley *et al.*, 2010).
- Although rates of concern among adults about youth 'hanging around' the streets have declined, 27 per cent of adults still report this as being a major worry in their neighbourhoods (Flatley *et al.*, 2010).

Reflections on the research

Activity 1

How do you reconcile public perceptions of high rates of juvenile crime with the research evidence on young people, crime and violence discussed in Chapter 2, pp. 30–33?

Activity 2

What might be the factors that influence public perceptions of youth crime?

5 Villains and Victims

Examples from research—Media contributions to crime

Rob Reiner looked at historical trends in news media crime reporting in post war Britain, comparing reports in broadsheets such as *The Times* with tabloids such as the *Daily Mail*. Reiner argued that for a crime to occur there are several necessary pre-conditions—labelling, motive, means, opportunities and absence of controls. The media potentially plays a part in each of these.

- *Labelling*—Behaviour needs to be named or labelled as offensive. The media help shape conceptual boundaries and can play an important role in creating new perceptions of crime. For example, the media were influential in creating moral panic about the crime 'mugging', violent street robbery by black male youth in the 1980s (Hall *et al.*, 1980). The media can also help raise awareness about crimes and the need for better responses. For example, in 1982 a fly-on-the-wall documentary TV programme was made on Thames Valley Police responses to rape victims. This resulted in campaigns to bring better treatment of rape victims by the police (Gregory and Lees, 1999).
- *Motive*—The media present universal images of common lifestyles which influence aspirations and feelings of anomie or relative deprivation, or perceptions of injustice which may motivate crime or create conditions for social learning (see research discussed in Chapter 2).
- *Means*—The media spread knowledge about criminal and abusive techniques. For example, the 10-year-old boys who killed James Bulger were said to have drawn upon knowledge gained from watching the video *Child's Play 3* during their ritualized abuse and dismemberment of the child.
- *Opportunity*—The media can influence people's routine activities and how they spend their leisure time, thereby also influencing opportunities for crime.
- *Absence of controls*—The media can glamorize violent and abusive behaviour, relaxing control and inhibitions.

Although research shows strong statistical associations between exposure to violent, criminal or sexualized materials and subsequent abusive and criminal behaviour, it is difficult to show conclusively the extent of any direct causal link because other factors apart from the media have an influence. This means that media exposure could have a lot or not much influence.

(Reiner, 2007, pp. 302–337)

6 Behaving Badly

Example of research—use of public space

Findings from the British Crime Survey of 10- to 15-year-olds 2009–2010:

- Eighty-one per cent of 10 to 15 year olds said they hang around public spaces.
- Fifty-two per cent do this at least once a week.
- Boys (25%) are more likely to hang around public spaces than are girls (17%).
- One in five (20%) of 10- to 15-year-olds were moved on when hanging out with friends.
- Members of the public were most likely to move young people on (41%).
- Thirty-five per cent of 10- to 15-year-olds felt that teenagers hanging around public spaces was a problem, compared with 27 per cent of adults who saw this as a problem.
- Forty-five per cent of 10- to 15-year-olds in socially deprived areas saw teenagers hanging around in public as being a problem.
- Fifty-nine per cent of 10- to 15-year-olds thought there were enough activities for young people of their age in their neighbourhood.
- Eighty-four per cent of 10- to 15-year-olds said that parks and playgrounds were available, and 62 per cent said they used them.

6 Behaving Badly

Example of research—playing outdoors

New research from Savlon and Play England reveals that two-thirds of parents always had adventures outdoors as a child but worry that their children do not have the same opportunities today.

Many parents' fondest childhood memories are of playing outside; however, outdoor activities that for parents were part of growing up seem to be in danger of disappearing:

- Forty-two per cent of children report they have never made a daisy-chain.
- Thirty-two per cent have never climbed a tree.
- A quarter of children today have never had the simple pleasure of rolling down a hill.
- Forty-seven per cent of adults built dens every week as a child, yet 29 per cent of today's children say they have never built a den.
- One-third of children have never played hopscotch.
- One in ten children have never ridden a bike.

The research confirms parents' concerns that children are no longer spending their time playing outdoors. Seventy-two per cent of adults played outside rather than indoors, compared to 40 per cent of children today, with children now at risk of losing out on essential childhood experiences that outdoor play brings (www.playengland.org.uk/news, 8 July 2011).

6 Behaving Badly

Examples of research
Sexual victimization in Europe

A comparative study of sexual abuse, selling sex and use of pornography among 11,528 18-year-olds from Norway, Sweden, Lithuania, Estonia and Poland found that 93.1 per cent of boys and 71.7 per cent of girls had accessed pornography; 6.8 per cent of boys (9.4 per cent in Sweden) and 0.1 per cent of girls accessed pornography daily. Young people reported high rates of sexual victimization of others. Between 24.2 per cent (Estonia) and 9.7 per cent (Norway) of boys had dragged, persuaded, pressed or forced someone into sexual activities. Between 10.5 per cent (Estonia) and 1.5 per cent (Norway) of girls had done this (Goran Svedin, 2007). In the UK research found 31 per cent of girls and 16 per cent of boys aged 13 to 17 years report having experienced sexual abuse from an intimate partner (Barter *et al.*, 2009).

Sexualization of childhood

In a recent content analysis of computer games, 83 per cent of male characters were portrayed as aggressive, while 60 per cent of female characters were portrayed in a sexualized way and 39 per cent were scantily clad. In the game Rape-Lay, which was available to buy online from Amazon, players take on the role of a rapist who stalks a mother before raping her and her daughters. In Grand Theft Auto players get the chance to beat up prostitutes and in Tour of Duty they can realistically slice to pieces with bullets enemy combatants. While parents have a role in preventing children's access to this technically age-restricted material, the availability of online games on the internet where age is difficult to assess increases the likelihood of children coming into contact with material which is assumed to be only appropriate for adults (Papadopolous, 2009).

6 Behaving Badly

Example of research—Sexual victimization of children in the UK

Figure 6.1 shows the rates of reported experiences of sexual abuse in childhood by children and young people from the most recent research into children's and young people's experiences of maltreatment and victimization (see Chapter 1).

Table 6.1 provides the rates for each specific type of contact and non-contact sexual abuse reported by the sample of 2,274 young people aged 11 to 17 years and the sample of 1,761 young adults aged 18 to 24 years reporting on their experiences prior to the age of 18.
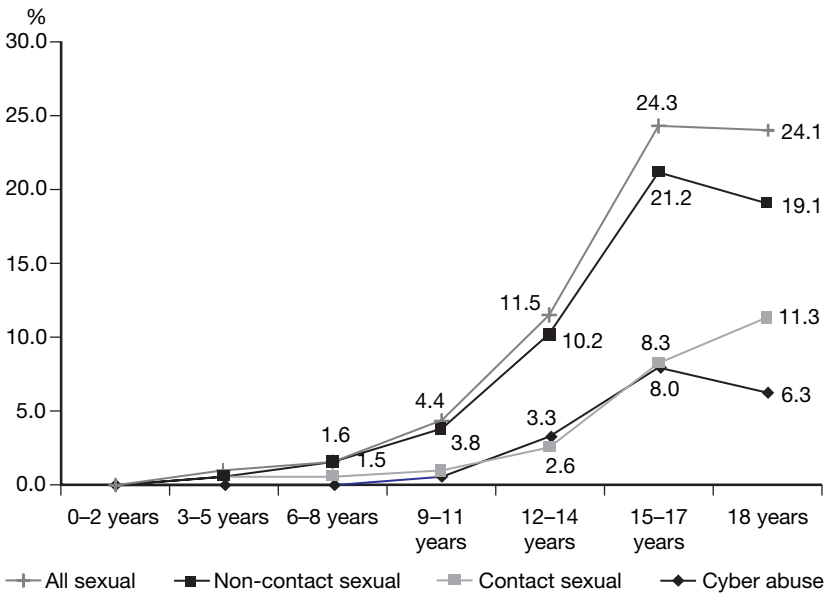

Figure 6.1 Rates of lifetime contact sexual abuse reported by children and young people by age
Source: Radford *et al*. (2011)

Table 6.1 Frequency of lifetime childhood experiences of sexual abuse reported by children and young people aged 11 to 17 and by young adults aged 18 to 24

Type of sexual abuse in childhood	11 to 17 years (%)	18 to 24 years (%)
Experiences of contact sexual abuse in childhood		
Sexually assaulted or forced sex by an adult	0.7	3.5
Sexually assaulted or forced sex by person under 18	2	4.5
Someone attempted sexual assault	2.6	6.1
Did sexual things with an adult in a 'position of trust' (teacher, clergy, youth worker, etc.)	0.8	0.5
Did sexual things while under 16 with a person aged over 18	1.4	2.4
Experiences of non-contact sexual abuse in childhood		
Flashing/forced to look at someone's private parts	7.1	10.8
Upset by someone saying or writing something sexual about young person or her/his body	6.5	8.1
Experienced online or mobile phone abuse	5.1	6.3
Experienced any sexual abuse in childhood	16.5	24.1

Source: Radford *et al.* (2011)

- The researchers found that young people aged under 18 were the most frequently reported perpetrators of sexual abuse in childhood. Perpetrators were 51 per cent peers, 21.8 per cent adults not living with the child, 20.7 per cent intimate partners, 4.8 per cent parents or guardians, and 3.6 per cent siblings. Persons aged under 18 were 65.9 per cent of the perpetrators reported in the survey (including peers, partners and siblings).
- Girls are the majority of the victims of childhood sexual abuse; 17.8 per cent report a lifetime experience of contact sexual abuse by age 18 compared with 5.1 per cent of boys.
- At ages 12 to 14 the gender difference between male and female rates of reported experiences of contact sexual abuse are smaller; 3 per cent of females have experienced contact sexual abuse by the time they reach 12 to 14 years compared with 2.3 per cent of males.
- By the age of 18 girls have experienced almost double the rates of non-contact sexual abuse compared with boys, The peak ages for reporting a lifetime experience of non-contact sexual abuse were found among young people at ages 15 to 17, when 27.5 per cent of females reported having a lifetime experience of non-contact sexual abuse compared with 15.2 per cent of males (Radford *et al.*, 2011).

Reflections on the research

Activity 1

Consider the data on sexual victimization presented above. What conclusions could you make about the risks of contact and non-contact sexual abuse for children and young people at different ages after age 11?

Activity 2

What conclusions could you make about the risks of online and mobile phone abuse to children of different ages over the age of 11?

7 Protection, Safeguarding and Prevention

Example of research: Child well-being in Europe

Table 7.1 Ranking of 6 out of 20 European nations on child well-being indicators

Country	Average ranking on all 6 indicators	1 Material well-being	2 Health and safety	3 Education	4 Family and peer relations	5 Behaviour and risks	6 Subjective well-being
Netherlands	4.2	10	2	6	3	3	1
Norway	8.7	2	8	11	10	13	8
Italy	10.0	14	5	20	1	10	10
Poland	12.3	21	15	3	14	2	19
Czech Republic	12.5	11	10	9	19	9	17
UK	18.2	18	12	17	21	21	20

Source: UNICEF (2007, p. 2)

Out of 20 European nations, the UK came bottom of the league in the UNICEF report on child well-being in Europe. Comparing the health and safety of children in 25 OECD countries the UK ranked a little better. Twelve countries had above-average overall child health and safety rankings with Sweden at the top (followed by Iceland, the Netherlands, Finland, Denmark, Italy, Spain, France, Norway, Switzerland, the Czech Republic and Germany). The UK was in the bottom 13 nations ranking with below-average health and safety for children at fifteenth, with the USA at the very bottom on this measure. Health and safety was measured by comparing rates of infant death, low birthweight, rates of child immunization and child deaths by accident and injury. Ranking the 25 OECD nations on rates of deaths from accident or injury, Sweden had the lowest rate among the 25 nations and the UK the second lowest. (UNICEF, 2007).

Reflections on the research
Activity

What does the UNICEF ranking about child well-being tell you about how well children in these European nations might be protected from harm?

7 Protection, Safeguarding and Prevention

Example of research

Serious case reviews

Brandon *et al.* (2008) studied 161 serious case reviews that occurred between 2003 and 2005. In two-thirds of the cases the children died and one-third were seriously injured. Forty-seven per cent of the children were aged under 1 but 25 per cent were over 11 years old, including 9 per cent who were over 16. Many older children were seen as 'hard to help' as they had experienced long-term maltreatment, were self-harming, substance misusers and often had mental health difficulties. Agencies appeared to have run out of strategies for supporting these older children and were sometimes reluctant to assess the young people as having mental health needs.

Only 12 per cent of the children killed or seriously harmed were on the child protection register but 55 per cent were known to children's social care services at the time of the incident. The families where children were physically injured were in contact with universal and adult services rather than with children's social care. In families where children suffered from long-term neglect, children's social care often failed to take into account the past history and adopted an optimistic 'start again syndrome' which involved putting aside the previous history. Where information was available on circumstances it was found that well over half of the children had been living with domestic violence, or parental mental ill-health, or parental substance misuse. These problems often co-existed.

Problems with identification and gaining information about the abuse or neglect found by the researchers included:

- Parents were often hostile towards helping agencies and workers were frightened to visit the family home.
- Apparent or disguised cooperation by parents often hindered awareness of the abuse.
- Parents made it difficult for professionals to see the children.
- Reluctant family engagement coupled with frequent house moves made records sketchy.
- Problems of communication and information sharing between agencies meant that only partial pictures of the family history emerged.

(Brandon *et al.*, 2008)

Reflections on the research

What strategies would be needed to overcome some of the barriers to identification and response highlighted by this research?

7 Protection, Safeguarding and Prevention

Examples from research: Messages from research

The Department of Health published *Messages from Research* in 1995. This identified a number of problems with an investigative child protection approach

- Although acts of serious physical violence and sexual abuse occur, harm to children rarely results from a one-off incident of abuse. It is living in an abusive environment over time that has harmful consequences.
- Emotional neglect greatly influences poor outcomes but the focus on child protection poorly addressed this problem.
- There was too much emphasis on investigation and forensic proof of significant harm, and too little attention given to welfare, prevention and treatment.
- An adversarial legalistic focus on 'proof' of abuse or neglect can be detrimental to children's well-being, since expert testimony is often divided and evidence uncertain.
- Children in need were filtered out of the system and received no support, or support that was discretionary.
- Thresholds vary and may be based more on resources available than on levels of need.
- Families are often resentful and avoidant of child protection involvement which is widely seen to be coercive and causing stigma rather than supportive.
- There was little evidence of engaging with parents and working in partnership with parents.

(Department of Health, 1995)

Reflections on the research

What might be the possible solutions to these difficulties? Consider the pros and cons of the following options:

- surveillance of the child's well-being;
- providing services to those who do not meet the child protection threshold;
- programmes to improve parenting;
- deciding cases out of court;
- more precise, research-based risk assessment to determine risk of harm;
- better assessment of the child's overall welfare needs in context;
- befriending and home visiting for vulnerable families;
- advocacy for children.