



A Review of Scotland's National Indicators Relating to Child Neglect

Final Report – 26 May 2022

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INTRODUCTION

The neglect of children is defined in the National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland 2021 as:

"the persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical and/or psychological needs, likely to result in the serious impairment of the child's health or development. There can also be single instances of neglectful behaviour that cause significant harm. Neglect can arise in the context of systemic stresses such as poverty and is an indicator of both support and protection needs"

Neglect can affect all ages of children, with its impact felt from pre-birth (if a mother neglects her own health during pregnancy this can affect the development in the womb) to infancy, pre-school, primary age to adolescence.

Aims of the paper

While professionals and policy makers alike recognise neglect as a key type of abuse, there is not an agreed means of measuring neglect, whether in terms of its risk factors, incidence, or its impact on children. Consequently, and as an action of the *Neglect Framework* developed by Child Protection Committees Scotland's Neglect Sub-Group, **this paper aims to provide a means of measuring (and then monitoring) neglect at the population level in Scotland.** In this regard, the paper can be used as an annex to the [Scottish Government's National Performance Indicators for Children and Young People](#). The paper is not designed to be used as a means of assessing the neglect of individual children.

This paper presents the neglect indicators that were suggested by members of the Neglect Sub-Group via a workshop convened by CELCIS in spring 2022. In presenting the indicators, some important caveats to note are:

- **Neglect is a multi-faceted type of harm and cannot be measured by one single indicator.** Instead a suite of indicators has been identified that, when analysed as a collective, can provide insight into the nature and prevalence of neglect at a population level.
- **The paper has only used existing indicators** and not sought to collect additional, new data. Taking this approach means that the use of data already collected and/or published in Scotland is maximised, but it also means that data gaps may remain unfilled. Where gaps exist, the paper aims to highlight these as potential areas for future data work.
- The data landscape in Scotland is constantly evolving. **This paper is therefore a snapshot in time based on the data available in spring 2022.** Where it is known that indicators will be available in the future, the paper makes these clear so that they can be considered when this data exercise is repeated.
- **Most of the indicators contained in this paper are proxy indicators.** This means that the indicators have been developed for different measurement purposes (e.g. to measure public health or educational attainment levels) but they have been incorporated into this paper as they tell us something about neglect. However, one must recognise that the extent to which different indicators are strong or weaker indicators of neglect will vary – and this has been considered by referring to 'risk factors' and 'impact' indicators of neglect (see next page).

- **Not all the indicator areas suggested in the Neglect Sub-Group's workshop are available and/or published.** Where data have not been sourced, these are set out as potential areas for future data work.

Structure of the paper

Neglect is a multi-faceted type of harm, with Horwath¹ (2007) finding that a child may be neglected through **a failure to meet medical, nutritional, emotional, educational and physical needs and a lack of supervision and guidance**. There is also increasing recognition in the academic and policy literature of **neglect at the societal or state level**, e.g. from the impact of child and family poverty and reductions in public services, that can increase or exacerbate the risk factors of neglect. These understandings of neglect have been used to structure the identification and analysis of this paper's collated indicators. Specifically, the paper is organised under the sub-headings of:

- Societal neglect.
- Medical neglect.
- Nutritional neglect.
- Physical neglect.
- Lack of supervision and guidance.
- Emotional neglect.
- Educational neglect.

For each of the indicators, their **definition, source, availability at local authority area level** (in case Child Protection Committees wish to replicate this exercise at their local level), **annual data for 2017-2021** (where available), and an assessment of whether the **trend** has been **improving, worsening** or is **unclear/staying the same** has been presented. To help boost the accessibility of the report, 'easy read' names of indicators have been provided alongside their technical definitions.

The paper also recognises that different indicators tell us different things about neglect. The paper has therefore sought to set out for each indicator whether it is an indicator that tells us about the:

- **Risk factors** associated with neglect – i.e. factors that can contribute to the neglect of children.
- **Impact** of neglect on children – i.e. indicators that children have experienced some form of neglect.

It is acknowledged that the above groupings of indicators (e.g. by type of neglect or type of indicator) will not be perfect. However, it is hoped that the means of organising and analysing the data is a helpful development and one that can be reviewed and refined by future iterations.

¹ Horwath, J (2007) *Child Neglect: Identification and Assessment*. Palgrave Macmillan.

SOCIETAL NEGLECT

To set the wider context to the data reported in this paper, the first set of indicators presented relate to societal or state neglect. With the exception of homelessness, all indicators show **increasing financial pressures on children and families**.

- Relative and severe child poverty have both been worsening to affect 26% and 20% of children respectively. This means that 200,000 to 250,000 children are experiencing poverty in Scotland.
- There are estimated to be 10% or 85,000 children in Scotland living in households experiencing long-term worklessness.
- Linked to the poverty data, Trussell Trust foodbank statistics show the number of parcels distributed to children in Scotland have also been increasing from 2017 (though with a small decline evident from 2020 to 2021).
- Homelessness, including living in temporary accommodation, affects around 20,000 children per annum.

EASY READ	TECHNICAL INDICATOR	INDICATOR TYPE	DATA SOURCE	AVAILABLE AT LOCAL LEVEL	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	TREND
Child poverty	Children living in relative poverty: below 60% of median income (%)	Risk factor	https://data.gov.scot/poverty/download.html	NO	23.2	23.6	22.9	26.4	NA	Red
	Children living in severe poverty: below 50% of median income (%)	Risk factor		NO	14.4	18.3	15.6	20.2	NA	
Workless households	Children living in long-term workless households: all adults have not worked for at least 12 months (%)	Risk factor	https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peoplenotinwork/unemployment/datasets/dchildrenlivinginlongtermworklesshouseholdsandworklesshouseholdsbyregion	NO	9.4	10.0	9.1	9.9	NA	Yellow
Foodbank use	Foodbank parcels distributed to children – Trussell Trust (number)	Risk factor	https://www.trusselltrust.org/news-and-blog/latest-stats/end-year-stats/#children	YES	49,314	55,986	71,430	81,049	77,123	Red
Homelessness	Children associated with applications assessed as homeless or threatened with homelessness (number)	Risk factor	https://www.gov.scot/publications/homelessness-scotland-2020-2021/documents/	YES	14,708	15,795	15,981	16,050	11,804	Yellow
	Children in temporary accommodation (number)	Risk factor		YES	6,060	6,615	6,795	7,280	7,130	

For future consideration, other indicator areas put forward by Neglect Sub-Group members were the provision and/or uptake of income maximisation activities (e.g. by social work), rate of unpaid household bills (e.g. energy bills or council tax), local authority housing team service data (e.g. unsustainable tenancies), the number of young carers (noting the number and needs of these young people are often under-reported), and Fire and Rescue service home safety data. There may also be opportunities to use data collected and reported by Social Security Scotland – specifically Best Start Grant/Best Start Foods, Scottish Child Payment and Young Carer Grant applications – and a child specific analysis of the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation.

MEDICAL NEGLECT

Maternity Indicators

In 2020, there were 46,809 babies born in Scotland. Interpreting the three indicators below within this context, the key messages are:

- **All three indicators are showing an improving trend**, with increased uptake of an antenatal booking within 12 weeks of pregnancy, falling levels of smoking among pregnant mothers, and proportionately fewer babies born of low birthweight.
- Applying the indicators to the 46,809 babies born in 2020, the data indicates that:
 - Up to 3,750 pregnancies are not booking their antenatal appointment within 12 weeks of pregnancy.
 - Up to 6,100 mothers are smoking in pregnancy.
 - Up to 2,350 babies are born of low birthweight.

EASY READ	TECHNICAL INDICATOR	INDICATOR TYPE	DATA SOURCE	AVAILABLE AT LOCAL LEVEL	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	TREND
Pregnancy booking	Maternal booking appointment: Antenatal booking within 12 weeks (%)	Risk factor	https://www.publichealthscotland.scot/publications/births-in-scottish-hospitals/births-in-scottish-hospitals-year-ending-31-march-2021/	YES	89.6	90.1	90.8	91.0	91.8	
Smoking in pregnancy	Maternal smoking status at booking appointment: Current smoker (%)	Risk factor		YES	15.0	15.2	14.6	13.9	13.1	
Babies of low birthweight	Low birthweight: babies born below 2500g (%)	Impact		YES	5.4	5.7	5.4	5.5	5.2	

Early Years Indicators

In 2020, there were 263,806 children aged 0-4 year olds living in Scotland. Interpreting the indicators below within this context, the key messages are:

- **Immunisation rates of babies remain very high**, with only around 4% of (or 1,950) babies not immunised for the 6-in-1 primary course by 12 months of age.
- The Universal Health Visitor Pathway has been implemented over the 2017-2021 timeframe and this can be seen with the **improving uptake of newer reviews at 13-15 months and 4-5 years. The 27-30 month review is longer established and coverage has remained stable at approximately 90% of infants** assessed by a health visitor. The converse means that approximately 5,000 infants aged 27-30 months are not reviewed.
- **The outcomes of the 13-15 month health visitor reviews show an improving trend** with lower proportions of infants having identified developmental concerns. **The proportion of 27-30 month and 4-5 year reviews show a fluctuating trend.** Across the three reviews, **it can be estimated that 30,000 to 35,000 children aged 1-5 years old have an identified developmental concern.**

EASY READ	TECHNICAL INDICATOR	INDICATOR TYPE	DATA SOURCE	AVAILABLE AT LOCAL LEVEL	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	TREND
Immunisations of babies	Immunisations – uptake of 6-in-1 primary course by 12 months of age (%)	Risk factor	https://publichealthscotland.scot/publications/childhood-immunisation-statistics-scotland/childhood-immunisation-statistics-scotland-quarter-and-year-ending-30-september-2021/	YES	96.6	95.9	96.1	96.5	NA	
Health Visitor assessments of infants taking place	Coverage / uptake of 13-15 month Health Visitor review (%)	Risk factor	https://publichealthscotland.scot/publications/early-child-development/early-child-development-statistics-scotland-2020-to-2021/	YES	NA	53.0	71.6	87.9	90.3	
	Coverage / uptake of 27-30 month Health Visitor review (%)	Risk factor		YES	89.5	90.5	91.7	89.3	90.8	
	Coverage / uptake of 4-5 year Health Visitor review (%)	Risk factor		YES	NA	22.5	38.5	73.0	81.0	
Infants with developmental concerns	13-15 month children with a concern about any developmental domain (%)	Impact	https://publichealthscotland.scot/publications/early-child-development/early-child-development-statistics-scotland-2020-to-2021/	YES	NA	10.3	11.5	9.7	9.6	
	27-30 month children with a concern about any developmental domain (%)	Impact		YES	17.6	15.4	14.5	14.3	14.9	
	4-5 year children with a concern about any developmental domain (%)	Impact		YES	NA	10.2	12.2	13.1	12.6	

Adolescent Indicators

Only one adolescent medical neglect indicator has been identified: the proportion of children admitted to hospital with an alcohol condition. For the indicator, the trend has fluctuated with an increase from 2017 to 2019-2020, but falling to 912 children in 2021.

EASY READ	TECHNICAL INDICATOR	INDICATOR TYPE	DATA SOURCE	AVAILABLE AT LOCAL LEVEL	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	TREND
Children with alcohol conditions	Children and young people (0-19 years) as alcohol condition hospital patients (number)	Impact	https://www.opendata.nhs.scot/dataset/alcohol-related-hospital-statistics-scotland	NO	960	966	1,008	1,008	912	

In addition to the statistics set out above, the [Public Health Scotland \(2022\) Ensuring our future: addressing the impact of COVID-19 on children, young people and their families](#) provides greater insight into and explanation of the health impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

For future consideration, other indicator areas put forward by Neglect Sub-Group members were Emergency Department admissions of children and young people, alcohol consumption by pregnant mothers, teenage pregnancies, maternal low mood / mental health and domestic abuse data captured through Universal Health Visiting Pathway screening data, infant mental health screening tools data, non-attendance at hospital and/or GP appointments, the number of comprehensive medical assessments, persistent headlice infestations, and adolescent sexual health.

NUTRITIONAL NEGLECT

Indicators relating to unhealthy weight, eating of breakfast, and dental hygiene have been identified – noting some of these could also be classified as medical neglect indicators.

- For unhealthy weight, Body Mass Index (BMI) data for Primary 1 children finds that the proportion of underweight children is small at 1% of (or 500) Primary 1 children. However, the proportion of children at risk of obesity has increased from 10% in 2017-2020 to 16% of (or 9,000) Primary 1 children in 2021. This could be a consequence of COVID-19 lockdown restrictions and reduced opportunities for physical exercise, but it could also reflect higher costs of living and the comparative affordability and accessibility of less nutritious food. **Applying the Primary 1 obesity data to the 1 million 0-17 years old in Scotland, 160,000 children would be at risk of obesity.**
- Survey data is referred to for understanding breakfast eating rates among 11-15 year olds. The 2018 data shows eating breakfast every day reduces from 76% of 11 year old children to 51% of 15 year olds.
- **National Dental Inspection Programme data indicates that dental hygiene is improving slightly, albeit with few data points. Nevertheless, still 20%-25% of (or 90,000) primary school age children have obvious dental decay.** Survey data of 11-15 year olds suggests that only 75% brush their teeth twice a day and self-reported dental issues are higher than that found by the National Dental Inspection Programme.

EASY READ	TECHNICAL INDICATOR	INDICATOR TYPE	DATA SOURCE	AVAILABLE AT LOCAL LEVEL	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	TREND
Underweight children	Primary 1 children with a BMI 'at risk of underweight': Epidemiological (%)	Impact	https://www.publichealthscotland.scot/publications/primary-1-body-mass-index-bmi-statistics-scotland/primary-1-body-mass-index-bmi-statistics-scotland-school-year-2020-to-2021/	YES	1.0	1.1	1.0	1.0	0.8	
Obese children	Primary 1 children with a BMI 'at risk of obesity': Epidemiological (%)	Impact		YES	10.5	10.2	10.3	10.3	15.5	
Having breakfast	Children reporting eating breakfast every morning on weekdays (%) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 11 year olds • 13 year olds • 15 year olds 	Risk factor	Health Behaviour in School-aged Children survey - https://www.gla.ac.uk/media/Media_707475_smxx.pdf	NO	NA	76 60 51	NA	NA	NA	NA

EASY READ	TECHNICAL INDICATOR	INDICATOR TYPE	DATA SOURCE	AVAILABLE AT LOCAL LEVEL	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	TREND
Teeth brushing	Children reporting brushing teeth twice a day (%) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 11 year olds • 13 year olds • 15 year olds 	Risk factor		NO	NA	73 74 79	NA	NA	NA	NA
Dental decay	Primary 1 children with obvious decay in their primary teeth (%)	Impact	https://ndip.scottishdental.org/	YES	NA	28.9	NA	26.5	NA	
	Primary 7 children with obvious decay in their primary teeth (%)	Impact		YES	22.9	NA	20.0	NA	NA	
	Children reporting any dental issue (%) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 11 year olds • 13 year olds • 15 year olds 	Impact	Health Behaviour in School-aged Children survey - https://www.gla.ac.uk/media/Media_707475_smx.pdf	NO	NA	53 53 54	NA	NA	NA	NA

PHYSICAL NEGLECT

The indicators identified under physical neglect are the most acute measures of child neglect as they relate to child protection registrations, referrals to the Children’s Reporter, Compulsory Supervision Orders, and crimes recorded by Police Scotland.

- The analysis begins with a chart that compares the (other) concerns recorded for children registered with neglect to children where neglect is not a recorded concern. The chart highlights a **close connection between the neglect of children and non-engaging families**.
- The number of children on the child protection register with neglect recorded as a concern progressively increased from 2017 to 2020, but has fallen in 2021. However, while the number of children has fallen, **the proportion of all registrations where neglect is a recorded concern has increased to 45%-46% of all registrations**.
- Non-engaging families are a concern closely connected to neglect but it is hard to identify a consistent trend across the four indicators.
- **Referrals and Compulsory Supervision Orders data from the Children’s Reporter show a different trend with the numbers attributed to ‘lack of parental care’ grounds reducing between 2017 and 2021**. Numbers in 2021 are markedly lower than in 2020 and this could be due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Children’s Hearing system.
- **Police Scotland data on the number of cruel and unnatural treatment of children offences has fluctuated** at approximately 600 recorded crimes per annum.

- **Hospital admissions of 0-14 year olds for unintentional injuries shows an improving trend** with rates of admissions progressively decreasing from 2017 to 2021.
- **Child deaths data shows an unclear trend**, with an increase to 2020 but a decrease in 2021.

The chart shows the non-neglect concerns recorded at Child Protection Registration for the children newly registered in 2020-21. The children newly registered are split into two groups:

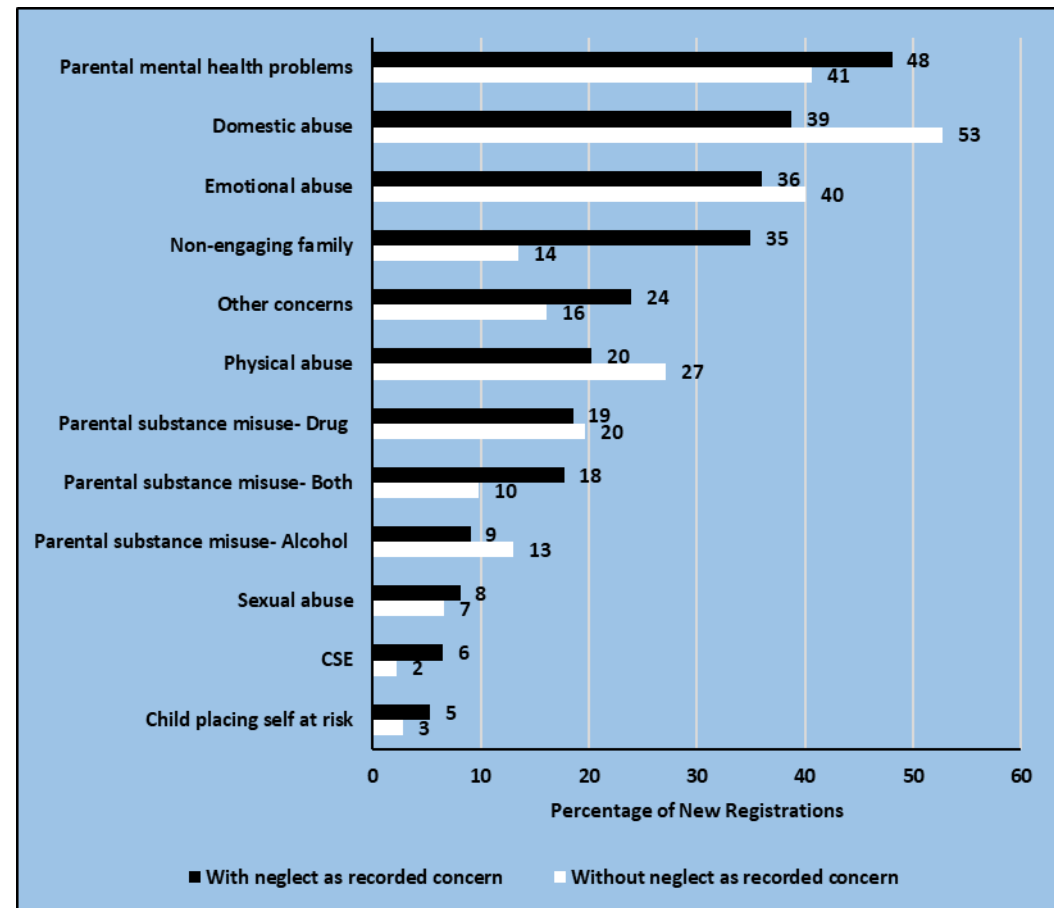
- The 1,447 children where neglect was recorded as a concern at registration.
- The 2,007 children where neglect was not recorded as a concern at registration.

The analysis shows **children where neglect was recorded as a concern at registration were more likely to also have the following concerns** recorded:

- **Non-engaging family** (35% versus 14% of children where neglect was not recorded).
- **Parental substance abuse – both drug and alcohol** (18% versus 10%).
- **Child sexual exploitation** (6% versus 2%).
- **Parental mental health problems** (48% versus 41%).
- **Other concerns** (24% versus 16%).

Given the relationship between neglect and non-engaging family, these two concerns indicators are considered in greater depth below.

Other Concerns on Registration: Children with Neglect and without Neglect (% of New Registrations, 2020/21)



Source: Bespoke analysis provided by Scottish Government

EASY READ	TECHNICAL INDICATOR	INDICATOR TYPE	DATA SOURCE	AVAILABLE AT LOCAL LEVEL	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	TREND
Neglect leading to child protection registration	Children newly registered with Neglect as a recorded concern (number)	Impact	Not published – data sourced from Scottish Government for this paper	NA	1,555	1,596	1,610	1,565	1,447	
	Children newly registered with Neglect as a recorded concern (% of new registrations each year)	Impact		NA	36.2	36.6	36.2	39.1	45.0	
	Children on the Child Protection Register with Neglect as a recorded concern (number)	Impact	https://www.gov.scot/publications/childrens-social-work-statistics-scotland-2020-21/	YES	936	980	1,055	1,113	971	
	Children on the Child Protection Register with Neglect as a recorded concern (% of all registered)	Impact		YES	36.0	38.7	40.9	41.9	46.2	
Non-engaging family leading to child protection registration	Children newly registered with Non-Engaging Family as a recorded concern (number)	Risk factor	Not published – data sourced from Scottish Government for this paper	NO	934	870	1,011	886	777	
	Children newly registered with Non-Engaging Family as a recorded concern (% of new registrations each year)	Risk factor		NO	21.8	22.0	21.7	23.5	27.0	
	Children on the Child Protection Register with Non-Engaging Family as a recorded concern (number)	Risk factor	https://www.gov.scot/publications/childrens-social-work-statistics-scotland-2020-21/	YES	622	597	687	620	537	
	Children on the Child Protection Register with 'Non-Engaging Family' as a recorded concern (% of all registered)	Risk factor		YES	23.9	23.6	26.6	23.1	25.5	
	Children referred to the Children's Reporter on	Impact		YES	5,643	4,623	4,201	4,230	3,449	

Lack of parental care	'Lack of Parental Care' grounds (number)		https://www.scra.gov.uk/resources_articles_category/official-statistics/								
	Children with Compulsory Supervision Order made on 'Lack of Parental Care' grounds (number)	Impact		YES	NA	1,706	1,732	1,604	924		
Neglect crimes	Cruel and unnatural treatment of children offences (number of crimes recorded)	Impact	https://www.scotland.police.uk/spa-media/adilxnrv/force-quarterly-bulletin-quarter-4-official.pdf	YES	NA	564	717	568	597		
Hospital admissions for unintentional injuries	Rate of 0-14 year olds admitted to hospital for unintentional injury (Rate per 100,000)	Impact	https://www.publichealthscotland.scot/publications/unintentional-injuries/unintentional-injuries-hospital-admissions-year-ending-31-march-2021-and-deaths-year-ending-31-december-2020/	YES	855.2	840.9	831.3	827.4	711.2		
Child deaths	Babies up to 1 years old	Impact	Not published – data sourced from Police Scotland for this paper	NO	NA	38	45	44	34*		
	Infants aged 1-2 years	Impact		NO	NA	5	5	9	6*		
	All under 16 year olds	Impact		NO	NA	69	82	94	84*		

* Police Scotland have also provided data for 2021-22. These are: 37 deaths for babies; 9 deaths for 1-2 year olds; and 75 deaths for all under 16s (which increases to 86 for under 18s in 2021-22).

For future consideration, other indicator areas put forward by Neglect Sub-Group members were the recording of neglect as a concern at earlier stages of the child protection process (e.g. at Inter-agency Referral Discussion), the number of children experiencing neglect whose parents had themselves experienced neglect as a child, helpline data relating to neglect (e.g. from Childline or Parentline), and domestic violence incidents.

LACK OF SUPERVISION AND GUIDANCE

The indicators identified under lack of supervision and guidance relate more to older children.

- **Police Scotland data on the number of children reported missing has fallen progressively since 2018**, but numbers are still significant at over 7,000 children per annum.
- Survey data from 2018 finds that **16% of (or 9,000) 15 year olds reported drinking alcohol on a weekly basis, while 11% (or 6,000) reported smoking on a weekly basis.**

EASY READ	TECHNICAL INDICATOR	INDICATOR TYPE	DATA SOURCE	AVAILABLE AT LOCAL LEVEL	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	TREND
Missing children	Number of Children Reported Missing	Impact	Not published – data sourced from Police Scotland for this paper	NO	13,611	14,013	12,831	9,002	7,124*	
Teenage drinking	Children reporting weekly drinking of alcohol: 15 year olds (%)	Risk factor	Health Behaviour in School-aged Children survey - https://www.gla.ac.uk/media/Media_707475_smxx.pdf	NO	NA	16	NA	NA	NA	NA
Teenage smoking	Children reporting as a current smoker: 15 year olds (%)	Risk factor		NO	NA	11	NA	NA	NA	NA

* Police Scotland have also provided data for 2021-22, with 8,947 children reported missing.

EMOTIONAL NEGLECT

The indicators set out under emotional neglect relate to child protection registrations with emotional abuse and domestic abuse as recorded concerns, and indicators relating to the levels of family support reported by children. A further indicator has been presented relating to parents' own reporting of their confidence in their parenting.

- **Child protection registration data shows domestic abuse and emotional abuse are prominent categories, with domestic abuse seemingly becoming increasingly prominent.** Both concerns each account for around 40% of registrations, noting that a child can be registered under multiple concerns.
- From the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children survey, between **50% to 75% of 11-15 year olds in 2018 reported that they had high levels of family support.**
- From the Growing Up in Scotland study, **only 1% of S3 children in 2020 felt their parents do not pay attention to them or would provide help to them if needed.**
- Also from the Growing Up in Scotland study, **6% of parents in 2020 felt moderately or very incompetent and lacking in confidence in their parenting.**

EASY READ	TECHNICAL INDICATOR	INDICATOR TYPE	DATA SOURCE	AVAILABLE AT LOCAL LEVEL	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	TREND
Domestic abuse leading to child protection registration	Children newly registered with Domestic Abuse as a recorded concern (number)	Risk factor	Not published – data sourced from Scottish Government for this paper	NO	1,704	1,584	1,763	1,756	1,618	
	Children newly registered with Domestic Abuse as a recorded concern (% of new registrations each year)	Risk factor		NO	39.7	37.3	41.0	44.3	46.8	
	Children on the Child Protection Register with Domestic Abuse as a recorded concern (number)	Risk factor	https://www.gov.scot/publications/childrens-social-work-statistics-scotland-2020-21/	YES	957	959	1,050	1,143	989	
	Children on the Child Protection Register with Domestic Abuse as a recorded concern (% of all registered)	Risk factor		YES	36.8	36.9	40.4	44.0	38.0	
Emotional abuse leading to child protection registration	Children newly registered with Emotional Abuse as a recorded concern (number)	Risk factor	Not published – data sourced from Scottish Government for this paper	NO	1,626	1,675	1,705	1,507	1,324	
	Children newly registered with Emotional Abuse as a recorded concern (% of new registrations each year)	Risk factor		NO	37.9	39.4	39.7	38.0	38.3	
	Children on the Child Protection Register with Emotional Abuse as a recorded concern (number)	Risk factor	https://www.gov.scot/publications/childrens-social-work-statistics-scotland-2020-21/	YES	991	1,005	1,035	1,029	796	
	Children on the Child Protection Register with Emotional Abuse as a recorded concern (% of all registered)	Risk factor		YES	38.1	39.7	40.1	39.0	37.8	
Family support	Children reporting high family support (%) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 11 year olds • 13 year olds • 15 year olds 	Risk factor	Health Behaviour in School-aged Children survey - https://www.gla.ac.uk/media/Media_707475_smx.pdf	NO	NA	74 58 51	NA	NA	NA	NA
	Children (S3 pupils) feel their parent(s) do not pay attention to me (%)	Risk factor	Scottish Government (2022) Life at age 14: initial findings from the Growing Up in Scotland study	NO	NA	NA	NA	0.9	NA	NA

	Children (S3 pupils) feel they cannot count on their parent(s) to help me when I have a problem (%)	Risk factor		NO	NA	NA	NA	1.4	NA	NA
Parental confidence in their parenting	Parents feeling moderately or very incompetent and lacking in confidence in their parenting (%)	Risk factor	Scottish Government (2022) Life at age 14: initial findings from the Growing Up in Scotland study	NO	NA	NA	NA	6.1	NA	NA

EDUCATIONAL NEGLECT

Education indicators for 2020 and 2021 are difficult to interpret with certainty due to the impact of COVID-19 and consequent school closures and periods of pupil self-isolation. With this caveat, the key findings from the educational neglect indicators identified below are:

- **Pupil attendance levels have been worsening to, on average, Scotland's primary school pupils attending 94% of school dates in 2021 and secondary school pupils at 89%.** However, a more meaningful measure would be the number of school pupils who attend for (e.g.) less than 80% of school dates – i.e. a measure of persistent school absence.
- Offering a different trend to attendance rates, **the rate of pupils being excluded has been improving.**
- Primary school age attainment levels had been improving from 2017 to 2019 but, and noting data was not collected in 2020, **attainment levels decreased in 2021.**
- For adolescents, around **4% (or 2,000 per year) of children leave school with no or low qualifications.** In terms of the destinations of all school leavers, around **5% (or 2,500 per year) leave school and become unemployed or economically inactive.**
- The final indicator is taken from the Growing Up in Scotland study and finds that **11% of parents in 2020 reported they did not participate in any activities at their child's school in last year.**

EASY READ	TECHNICAL INDICATOR	INDICATOR TYPE	DATA SOURCE	AVAILABLE AT LOCAL LEVEL	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	TREND
Attending school	Primary school pupil attendance – when schools open, half days (%)	Risk factor	https://www.gov.scot/publications/school-attendance-and-absence-statistics/	YES	94.9	NA	94.5	NA	94.0	Red
	Secondary school pupil attendance – when schools open, half days (%)	Risk factor		YES	91.2	NA	90.7	NA	89.1	
Excluded from school	Pupil exclusions (rate per 1,000 pupils)	Impact	https://www.gov.scot/publications/school-exclusion-statistics/	YES	26.8	NA	21.6	NA	11.9	Green

EASY READ	TECHNICAL INDICATOR	INDICATOR TYPE	DATA SOURCE	AVAILABLE AT LOCAL LEVEL	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	TREND
Attainment among primary school children	P1, P4 & P7 Pupils combined achieving expected Curriculum for Excellence Levels: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading (%) • Writing (%) • Listening & Talking (%) • Literacy (%) • Numeracy (%) 	Risk factor	https://www.gov.scot/publications/achievement-curriculum-excellence-cfe-levels-2020-21/documents/	YES	77.4 72.3 83.2 69.2 76.4	79.2 74.3 85.2 71.4 78.4	79.8 75.1 85.9 72.3 79.1	NA NA NA NA NA	75.2 69.8 82.7 66.9 74.7	
School leavers with low / no qualifications	School leavers achieving less than an SCQF Level 4 qualification (%)	Impact	https://www.gov.scot/publications/summary-statistics-attainment-initial-leaver-destinations-no-4-2022-edition/documents/	YES	3.7	3.8	4.1	4.2	3.8	
School leavers not going on to study or work	School leavers entering a non-positive initial destination (%)	Impact		YES	6.1	5.4	5.0	6.7	4.5	
Parental engagement with schools	Parents did not participate in any activities at child's school in last year (%)	Risk factor	Scottish Government (2022) Life at age 14: initial findings from the Growing Up in Scotland study	NO	NA	NA	NA	10.6	NA	NA

For future consideration, other indicator areas put forward by Neglect Sub-Group members were home schooling levels, the number of children missing from education, attendance and attainment levels by areas of deprivation (using the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation), and data that could be provided from school counselling services.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper has sought to map out the indicators of neglect that can be sourced through existing published datasets, and then provide an analysis of the data to consider key trends. In undertaking this exercise, it is encouraging to find that there a wide range of indicators available (and further data will also be available from the **Health and Wellbeing Census** – see box below) but many of these are best described as proxy indicators of neglect and could be linked to other causes.

A future important source of data will be the **Health and Wellbeing Census** which is asked of P5 to S6 pupils and includes questions from existing surveys (e.g. the Growing Up in Scotland study and Health Behaviour in School-aged Children survey).

Questions for consideration would include:

- I have an adult to talk to at school if I am worried about something
- My parents (or carers) really care about my education
- I've been feeling loved
- Some children and young people go to school or to bed hungry. How often does this happen to you?
- Adults are good at listening to what I say
- Do you have an adult in your life who you can trust and talk to about any personal problems?

In interpreting the data currently available, the **impact of the COVID-19 pandemic** has made this more challenging. From a statistical perspective, the COVID-19 pandemic meant data for some indicators were not collected in 2020 or 2021, so presenting a break in the time series. From an analytical perspective, it is unclear whether 2020 or 2021 data (where available) are representative of long-term, structural or societal trends or distinct due to the pandemic and its associated impact on health, education, household finances, etc.

Notwithstanding these caveats, the paper provides oversight at the Scotland level of the indicators that are improving and those that are worsening. Beginning with the **indicators with improving trends from 2017**, these are:

- Maternity indicators (e.g. antenatal bookings, maternal smoking rates and babies of low birthweight).
- Developmental concerns of infants aged 13-15 months.
- Number of children reported as missing.
- Exclusion of pupils from school.

In contrast, **the indicators that are presenting worsening trends from 2017** are as follows:

- Children living in child poverty – including children receiving foodbank parcels.
- Children living in temporary accommodation.
- Obesity among Primary 1 school age children.

- Children on the Child Protection Register with Neglect as a recorded concern. Domestic Abuse has also been increasing.
- School pupil attendance, with this most pronounced among secondary school age children.

The paper has also shown the **close relationship between children registered with neglect as a recorded concern and services finding it hard to engage with families.**

The worsening trends outlined above point towards potential areas for policy and practice consideration. Specifically, and with close alignment to recent recommendations put forward by Bywaters and Skinner² (2022) of: (i) national 'levelling up' policies that cut family poverty, especially deep and persistent poverty, and insecurities affecting income, housing and employment; and (ii) the children's social care system engaging much more effectively with children's and families' basic material needs as a key factor for child protection; the Scotland data highlights the importance of:

- **Poverty-aware practice** at a time when cost of living and child poverty levels are already high and worsening. Poverty can exacerbate family pressures and tensions, which in turn can lead to children experiencing neglect.
- **Financial support for families** whether in the form of increases to welfare payments, direct payments to families, and subsidising energy, housing and food costs.
- **High quality relationship-based practice** (that may extend to intensive family support services) to build connections with non-engaging families given the relationship between neglect and non-engaging families.
- **Noticing and responding to early signs of potential neglect**, such as developmental concerns of infants, child diet and obesity, non-attendance at school, parental mental health and substance use.

However, the data presented is neither comprehensive nor explanatory of the contributory factors behind these trends. National and local stakeholders are therefore encouraged to consider wider data and service intelligence that they have to understand neglect in their areas, the contributory factors (including changes to national and local practices), and what approaches have been effective in addressing neglect.

² Bywaters, P and Skinner, G (2022) *The Relationship Between Poverty and Child Abuse and Neglect: New Evidence*. Nuffield Foundation.