

Child and Adolescent Mental Health

Focused on children most at risk, our fundamental purpose is to:

- make effective decisions about a need to refer a child to a Children's Hearing
- enable children and families to participate in Hearings
- provide suitable accommodation for Children's Hearings
- disseminate information and data to inform and influence improved outcomes for children and young people

Background

Children experiencing a mental health problem can be referred to the Reporter on a number of different grounds. In some cases, the mental health issue may form a part of the ground for referral, in others it may emerge as part of the Reporter's investigation into the child's background and circumstances.

SCRA research

SCRA research showed that 13% of children referred to the Reporter had an identified mental health problem. This compares with a figure of 10% for the general child population in Scotland.

Further research looked into those children who were given a Movement Restriction Condition (MRC) by a Children's Hearing under the terms of the Antisocial Behaviour legislation. The research found that 25% of those children and young people given an MRC by a Children's Hearing had identified mental health issues, mostly related to self harm.

Another SCRA research report looked at "high risk" children, who are defined as "children who had caused serious harm to another person or were considered to be at risk of doing so." 41% of the children sampled had concerns over their mental health recorded in their case files.

While it would be wrong to assume a direct causal link between challenging/offending behaviour and mental health issues, it is clear that the groups above are likely to be in particular need of help and support.



Risk factors

SCRA research suggests that 33% of children referred to the Reporter had experienced physical, emotional or sexual abuse, while 43% had experienced domestic abuse. Research shows that these experiences are likely to increase the risk of developing a mental health condition.

Health and Sport Committee Inquiry

The Scottish Parliament's Health and Sport Committee conducted an inquiry into Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services in 2009 (CAMHS). SCRA was able to contribute to the inquiry and raised a number of issues with the Committee. One of the key areas was concern over the length of time it can take for an assessment report to be produced for a child following a request by the Reporter or a Children's Hearing. This depends to a great extent on the availability of resources in the local area, particularly if the child is not already known to CAMHS services and can impact on the ability of the Hearings System to make timely decisions in the best interests of children.

Early intervention

The Scottish Government's Early Years and Early Intervention Framework specifically references mental health outcomes for children and young people, along with the importance of engagement with parents at an early stage in the child's life in order to improve life chances and aid physical and emotional development. SCRA is supportive of this approach, as our research indicates that mental health problems often exist in parallel with other serious issues in a child's life. It is therefore undoubtedly of benefit to society and to the individual child that these be addressed as soon as possible.

GIRFEC

The Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) agenda specifically envisages closer multi-agency working and a single plan for each child with an identified lead professional. SCRA supports this approach and is hopeful that it will lead to closer multi-agency work at an early stage in order to identify the most appropriate channel for the child's needs to be addressed.

