

Very Young Children Referred to the Reporter

Focused on children and young people most at risk, SCRA's fundamental purpose is to:

- Make effective decisions about a need to refer a child/young person to a Children's Hearing
- Prepare for and participate in court proceedings where Statement of Grounds or Hearings findings are appealed, and ensure the wellbeing of children and young people – particularly vulnerable witnesses – are protected throughout the court process
- Support Panel Members (though we are not involved in making Hearing decisions) and ensure fair process in Hearings
- Enable children, young people and families to participate in Hearings
- Disseminate information and data to influence and inform the wider Children's Services community
- Provide premises for Hearings to take place
- Work collaboratively with partners to support and facilitate the Getting It Right For Every Child (GIRFEC) agenda

Children under the age of two are some of the most vulnerable in our society. Recent years have seen proportional increases in very young children referred. In 2019/20, 11.8% of all children and young people referred were under the age of 2 (1,521 children).

These children were mostly referred on grounds of lack of parental care. The Children's Hearings (Scotland) Act 2011 introduced a new ground of referral - close connection with a person who has carried out domestic abuse. We have seen significant numbers of children referred on this ground – 3,156 in 2019/20.

Compulsory and emergency measures

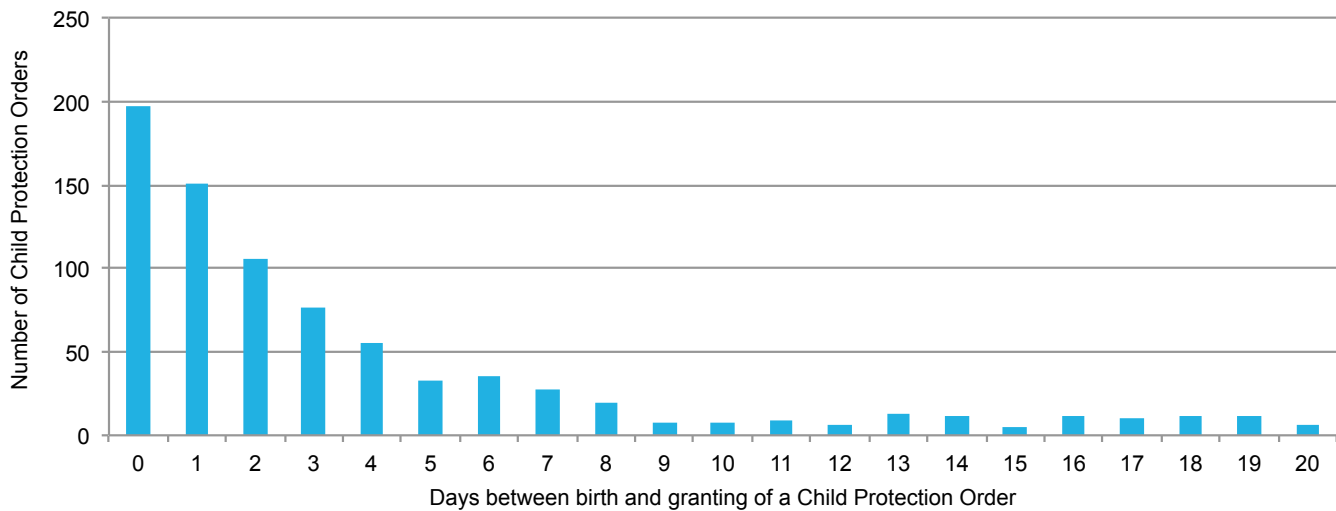
2019/20 also saw a continuation in the high numbers of children and young people with Child Protection Orders (CPOs) received, with 547 having CPOs in the year.

The granting of a CPO requires the child or young person to be removed to (or kept in) a place of safety away from home. For this measure to be considered, they must be at risk of significant harm.

Proportionately, more CPOs are granted for very young children, reflecting their greater vulnerability and requirement for immediate protection. Of the 547 children and young people with CPO referrals to Children's Hearings in 2019/20, 115 (21.0%) were aged under 20 days at the date of receipt and 237 (43.3%) were aged under two years.

Children under two ...	2018/19	2019/20
Subject to Interim Orders	656	578
Subject to Child Protection Orders	291	237
Subject to CSOs	746	677

Child Protection Orders for babies under 20 days old (from April 2014 to March 2020)



Family backgrounds*

Children under the age of two who are referred to the Reporter have difficult family backgrounds, characterised by:

- Unemployment and housing problems.
- Parents with drug and/or alcohol addictions.
- Parents with histories of offending and prison.
- Parents with mental health problems.
- Violence and domestic abuse.

However, there are also positive factors:

- Family support networks (particularly grandparents) and strong attachments between mothers and their children.
- Early identification of children being at risk – often before birth, and the range of services made available to children and their families.

Despite children being identified at a very young age and services being put in place to support their families, increasing numbers of very young children need compulsory and emergency measures to protect them from the dangers posed by the adults in their lives.

* Children aged under two years referred to the Children's Reporter (SCRA, 2009)



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