

1 Background

During the initial COVID-19 lockdown, the number of children placed on the Child Protection Register (CPR) with a risk indicator of parental mental health increased. During 2018 – 2020, the percentage with this risk indicator was between 14 and 19%. By week 21 of pandemic restrictions, this had reached 30%. The number of Vulnerable Persons reports recorded by Police Scotland rose by 39% during that period.

2 Research Question

What can we learn from the increase in the use of Parental Mental Health as a risk indicator for child protection registration during the first six months of the COVID-19 pandemic to help inform future practice and service provision?

3 Findings

Three quarters of the sample were families already known to Social Work Services, with 86% of those being open cases prior to the child protection investigation. Many cases had more than one source identifying concern. The sample was evenly split between children remaining with their parent and being removed. Most parents were involved with supports prior to March 2020 and continued to access them in some form during lockdown.

7 Further Considerations

Should parental mental health be used as a risk indicator where there is no medical diagnosis? Dialogue with ASP leads in respect of decision-making where there is a CP investigation. Consideration of the child's role as a young carer. Training on the impact of parental mental health should emphasise the likelihood of other issues. Clarify process for notifying Health re CP concerns.

6 Co-morbidities & Young Carers

Very few children were registered with parental mental health as the sole risk indicator. There were high levels of co-morbidity: parental drug misuse (57%), domestic abuse (57%), and parental alcohol misuse (54%). No evidence in any of the cases that consideration was given to the child as a young carer. Evidence of recording issues on EMIS.

Parental Mental Health as a Risk Indicator for CP Registration during COVID-19

5 COVID & Specific Impacts

In a small number of cases, there was explicit reference to how the pandemic had exacerbated an individual's mental health, but this was not commonly recorded as an issue. The reasoning for this was not evident. In several files, the parent having previous experience of removal of a child was cited as a factor aggravating their mental health.

4 Mental Health

Common concerns identified at the point of initiating the CP investigation were; anxiety (32%), volatile/aggressive/erratic behaviour (24%), depression (20%), self-harm (20%), low mood (16%), and suicidal ideation (16%). In 16% of cases there was insufficient detail to specify 'mental health'. Focus tended to be on maternal mental health, even in instances where there were concerns raised about a father's mental health. 16% of the parents required hospitalisation, but only one subject to compulsory detention. 31% had a formal diagnosis, including PND, acute stress, trauma, Personality Disorder, psychosis. 11% of parents referred for Adult Support & Protection assessment. None progressed further.

