

Submission from Child Protection Research Centre

I would like to submit evidence in support of the BSL (Scotland) Bill on behalf of Child Protection Research Centre, based at the University of Edinburgh/ NSPCC where I am employed as a Research Fellow; my field of research is child protection and deaf children. The Centre's work also covers other children of different impairments.

Previous research has found that deaf and/or disabled children are 3 to 4 times more likely to be abused than their non-disabled peers (Jones et al, 2012)^[i]. Stalker and McArthur (2012) also found that children with sensory impairments (including deaf children) were more likely to experience higher levels of violence and neglect than their non-disabled peers^[ii].

In 2013 the Child Protection Research Centre, led by Professor Julie Taylor, was commissioned by the Scottish Government Children's Rights and Wellbeing Division to investigate the relationship between professional practice, child protection and disability in Scotland. The team included Professor Stalker from Strathclyde University and their findings were published in 'Disabled Children and Child Protection in Scotland: Cause for Concern' (2014)^[iii]. The research team found evidence to suggest that the abuse of deaf and/or disabled children sometimes goes undetected and getting it right for every child should not mean treating every child the same. The report concluded that there was a lack of relevant training and higher thresholds when professionals were considering whether or not to intervene when working with deaf and disabled children. Deaf children were also found to have poor access to communication support for meetings with professionals.

A recent NSPCC's report 'We have a right to be safe - protecting disabled children from abuse' (Miller and Brown, 2014) also highlights a number of significant barriers within the child protection system that leave deaf and/ or disabled children at a greater risk of harm^[iv].

The Centre has just completed another piece of research, this time on behalf of NSPCC: 'Talking about Child Protection: The experiences of maltreated deaf and/ or disabled children and young people of the child protection system'. This research was commissioned specifically to address a significant gap in our current understanding of deaf and/ or disabled children and young people's experiences of the child protection system. The findings of this research are to be published soon and I will be happy to forward a copy to you.

The above research all strongly indicates that Deaf children are at a higher risk of abuse and that the thresholds at which professionals intervene in cases where there are child protection concerns about deaf children are higher, thereby placing them at potentially even more risk.

The BSL Act will help to improve access to services for deaf children and thereby reduce vulnerability and risk of being abused. Having access to BSL/ English interpreters and professionals who are fluent in BSL, would provide deaf children who have been abused with the support they need from the child protection system and improve long term outcomes.

I would be happy to meet with you, as would other members of the Centre, should you feel this would be helpful in terms of the committee's deliberations.

Yours sincerely,

Audrey Cameron

Dr Audrey M Cameron
Research Fellow
The University of Edinburgh / NSPCC
Child Protection Research Centre
The University of Edinburgh
Moray House School of Education